Characters

Speaker

Scene 1

even tho yr sampler broke down on you

SPEAKER
magnolias & forsythia blossom
from yr Sugar Hill/ Ray Drummond
plays nasty riffs & i imagine
alla the Palm Cafe turns out
when you glow at dusk on
Convent Avenue/ slidin easily by
the just-for-us propositions Gylan Kain
fashioned at every other Harlem corner/
we usedta leave deluxe issues of
love potions/ remedies even insinuations
danglin from Baptist steeples/ Methodist steps
jump back/ jump up/ beatin down/ flyin
yng wenches whose skirts still
tease solos over to the Savoy/

(you cd make yrself irresistible/ be my Willis Avenue Bridge/ floatin/ Rican wet *su lengua dulce*/ over an East River of gardenias/ remember the minor sixth)

you hummed to me while I was
reachin for the/ ceilin/ where our
folks was carryin on before Michelangelo
or Lionel Richie/ some where round there
where you brush up gainst baobabs/ well

(you know where my beauty marks are/ all over HARLEM)

we sing like flowers/ i see
round brown honies giggle at us/ the
silly/ niggahness of yr quick light
kisses/ *cómo* fresh/ *mi chabalo negro/ mi propio* Tito
Puente/
my own rhythmn section/ that petal
openin evey time yr lips/ let
love/ *cada vez*/ yr lips
let love fall/ all
over
Sugar Hill

Scene 2

serial monogamy

SPEAKER

i think/ we should reexamine/ serial monogamy
is it/ one at a time or
one for a long time?
how
does the concept of infinity relate to a skilled
serial monogamist/ & can
that person consider a diversionary escapade
a serial
one night stand?
can a consistent
serial monogamist
have one/ several/ or myriad relationships
that broach every pore of one's body
so long as there is no penetration?
do we/ consider adventurous relentless tongues
capable of penetration & if we do
can said tongues whip thru us indiscriminately
with words/ like
"hello"
"oh, you lookin good"
"you jigglin, baby"
cd these be reckless immature violations of
serial monogamy?
i mean/
if my eyes light up cuz
some stranger just lets go/ caint stop hisself
from sayin
"yr name must be paradise"
if i was to grin or tingle/ even get a lil happy/
hearin me & paradise/ now synonyms
does that make me a scarlet woman?
if i wear a red dress that makes someone else hot
does that put me out the fryin pan & into the
fire?
say/
my jade bracelet got hot

(which aint possible cuz jade aint jade if it aint cold)

but say
my jade got lit up & burst offa my wrist
& i say/
"i gotta find my precious stones
cuz they my luck"
& he say
"luck don't leave it goes where
you need it"
& i say
"i gotta find my bracelet"
& he say
"you know for actual truth

you was wearin this bracelet?"
& i say
"a course, it's my luck"
& he say
"how you know?"
& i say
"cuz
i heard my jade
flyin thru the air
over yr head
behind my knees
&
up under the Japanese lampshade!"
& he say
"you heard yr jade flyin thru the air?"
"yes"
i say
"& where were they flyin from"
he say
"from my arm" i say
"they got hot & jumped offa my arm"
"but/
where was yr arm?"
he say
& i caint say mucha nothin
cuz
where my arm was a part a some tremendous
current/
cd be 'lectricity or niggahs on fire/
so where my arm was is where/ jade gets hot
& does that imply the failure of serial monogamy?
do flamin flyin jade stones
on a arm/ that is a kiss/ & a man who knows where/
luck is
take the serial/ outta monogamy/ & leave
love?

Scene 3

intermittent celibacy

SPEAKER
listenin to bobby timmons & jackie wilson
does not encourage abstinence/
& it's not like smokey misled me/ either/
i cdn't get nobody to let me be a bad girl &
how i tried to get one of them/ to make me
a woman/
let me out the deprivations of virginty
anna mae wong's fans
flutterin
over audrey hepburn's shorn

head
in fronta the cross/
Holy Mary Mother of God/
let somebody else come take me/
surely
The Lord God Almighty
gotta 'nough virgins
to make a rich mullah
forsake Muhammed/

(figuratively speaking of course)

all i wanted
was to be/ revealed
& that's what happens to alla us
like/ unto
Mary Isis Oshun
Kali Ishtar Tlalozlatl
to leave the sexual covenant
of the Father
some other man/ has to make you bleed,
but
it gets better/
there are other fingers tongues loins hair/
everywhere
sweat/ sounds no one's ever heard/ an achin quiet
makes yearnin for salvation/ minor penance
all
this you can/ suffer
all
this/ minglin breath & cum
like the nectar offered on Olympus
from yr tongue to his cheek/ & his
shoulder/ the river niger is flowin/ &
you've fallen/ from
Grace
my dear/
you gave it up/ & now
whatchu gonna keep?
memories of inchoate
union
the mole on his left leg
chantin at the ashram
you say you gave up meat
you thought you were a
gift of god/
you close yr legs to the flesh
but does that fill you/ with the Holy Ghost?
is/ not runnin off with that pretty
muthafuckah you been hankerin after/
a spirit-filled occasion?

if/
you don't allow nobody
to touch you in the bed you share
but
the southeastern coast of france
is some/ other/ where you
available?
can
you touch yrself
&
when you do/ do you rush to say
"get thee behind me
Satan?"
or
has/ the devil caressed yr eyebrows
left you/ gaspin
for/ just one mo
temptation?
is it/ okay/
to wait a week
or/ say
change the sheets?
you know/
it's been a day & a half
since i had any/
& do any you've had
know you/ that you
a gift of god
& the devil's mistress/
abstinence
is not
celibacy
cuz/ when you filled with the Holy Ghost
every man/ in the world
can smell it/
you wake up drippin
with the
spirit
doves perch by yr clit
cooin with the drifters
til the paragons & the jesters
come/ flyin all they colors
lay claim/ to yr moans
bring you right up to em
with/ the "wind"
oh-oh-oh wind wind

Scene 4

chastening with honey

SPEAKER

by all rites i shd be writin
right to left/ upside down
or backwards/
speech/ shd run garbled & dyslexic thru my
brain/ til i hear yr voice
clearly/ again/
in some other/ life were you a mandala?
are you "OM"?
is shakti-pat/ yr regular metabolic status/
under ordinary circumstances?
oh/ there I go again
admirin myself/ unwittingly/
invitin some terribly/ lush *mot palabra son syllable*/
to flail
abt my bangs & lashes
so moist/ you smile/ i remember/ this is arrogance
& it's over
this/ chastening with honey
is nothin/ like the Passion of Christ/
which brought us Lent & we give up meat/
quit our lust/ for blood & bonbons/
Mohammed's trials brought Ramadan/ & we may only
quench our thirst for life from dawn to dusk/
& Buddha/ neath the bo tree/ spread joy abt our
ankles
so long as we rid ourselves of resentment &
impatience/ now Krishna/ is another kind of story/
but goatherds & goatherdesses/ sheperds &
sheperdesses/
all come with chastening.
you may/ sheer this wool/ wet it
braid it til you can wrap it round/ two or three
parallel/ cosmic strings/
just don't/ disrupt the ritual
the leap from maya to nirvana/ overwhelms
unwitting/ arrogance
& *je ne sais que ton insouciance*/ we
can't handle passion/ with the deftness
we associate with civil servants/ in Ibadan or
Bogota/
i am so lucky
this is the essence of life/ you
present yrself/ with the warmth of the Goddess/
the ferocity of Yahweh/ the glee of Shiva/ the
cunning of Coyote/ the de-groovi-licious breath of
Obatala/ like
there was some difference tween yr voice/ this
honey/ fallin off
my body/ & wild hummingbirds from the rain forest
appear
by the A train/ imaginin you some/ tropical flower

pollen
hoverin over Manhattan/ like the Muslim brother's
incense/
maybe/ if i burn you up/ i'd calm down/
the endorphin crazed
birds/ cd go back to the Amazon/ think abt it/
fire/ is a great rite of passage/ the pollen &
the honey & the
flyin birds by my cheek/ oh oh/ i understand/
this is the fall from the Garden.

Scene 5

a third generation geechee myth for yr birthday*(for John Purcell)*

SPEAKER
when we fall from the stars to the bellies of
our mothers/ some folks say
they's music in the air/ dontcha think/
we tumble thru a niggah
night/ etchin light
thru them black holes
unimaginable density
inconceivable radiance/ black
pitch/ maybe the air
in a black hole/ is the sacred hush of rushes round
lil baby moses/ or might cd be the fire
brightenin black holes/ is reliable
as maceo's wail/ when we glide
from planet to planet/ swing right past our own
down/ to our mothers' bellies
some folks say
they's a storm a comin/
& the sea belts the shores/ how
ben webster burst thru a eye of a hurricane/
gilmore singin volcanic steam/ fool enough
to rise up from ashes/ molten glowin
any kinda dead fire
caint/ fly out no niggah night/
to our mothers' bellies/ caint lead us
outta black hole/ slyly shepp or
prophet ayler/ overwhelming pressure
epistemologically/ impossible constructs/
left bird & dapper lester/ outside kansas city
goin somewhere/ must be/ on our way
cuz/ we done come careenin out severely colored
stratospheres/
surgin with the force of them/ what
am in the tradition/ & them what aint
caint/ smoke cigars or make light in a white hole
either/
be like playin a tenor wit a trumpet

mouthpiece/ mistakin junior walker
for philip glass/ no no no/ that aint our way
when/ we come sailin out the vistas of galaxies
tip/ our hats to marshall allen/
jimmy lyons/ maybe Mr˙ coltrane gone whiz by/
maybe not/ cd be an itinerant errant one-man-negro-band
over to Grand Central/ but
we all/ come gallopin out the heavens
to our mothers' bellies/ & the niggah
blue night/ you was wendin yo way
down heah/ *stars fell over alabama/ mood indigo*
new grass/ ornithology/ ascension/ freedom now/
crosstown traffic
& "i wonder who's lovin you"/ "better stop doggin me around"
"blase"/ say hey/ *"friends & neighbors"/ "doncha know you make me wanna*
shout" flew/ out yr mother's mouth
you/ burst out her body
& that's how/ you come to be
a reed man/

Scene 6

loosening strings or give me an ‘A’

SPEAKER
yes/ i listened to country joe & the fish/
yes/ i howled with steppenwolf/
yes/ fleetwood mac was my epiphany/
& creedance clearwater revival
swept me neath the waters/ hendrix
my national anthem always/ yes
blind lemon jefferson & b˙ b˙ huddle
by my stage door/ yes chuck berry lives
next to me/ yes
eric clapton made me wanna have
a child named layla/ yes
sonny sharrock drew screams outta me
linda can't eclipse/
yes/ i remember My Lai & the Audubon debacle
yes/ hamza-el-din is a caracole out my mouth
yes/ i never forgot where i came from &
nobody misses me cuz/
i never left
in search of a portrait
of an artist
as a yng man/
yes i read ULYSSES & he came home
yes/ oh/ yes
i know my/ Joyce

i cd tell niggah chords meant for me/
yes/ "I searchin . . . I'm searchin"/ my Olympics say
Circe/ the Scylla the Charybdis/
any Siren & all the Pentagon
yes/ Circe/ the Scylla/ the Charybdis,
any Siren/ and alla the Pentagon/
aint kept/ yes/ i say/ aint kept
this one/ yes/ niggah man/ from/ yes
makin art outta me/
yes/
"i'm gonna love him all over/ all over/
& over & over"
cuz niggahs aint in search of/
we/ just get discovered
so/ yes
i must be the New World now/ yes
i'm in tune
oh/ yes/ play me
pick/ my colored tones
yes/ strum my niggah/ chords
find/ my sharps & flats
let em/ have/ space
oh/ yes oh/ yes/ i know my Joyce
& Ulysses/ he done come home
yes/ play me/ now
yes/ make me alla that
yes/ i'll be the bottom or i cd just ride
yes/ i know my Joyce/ & all you gotta say/ is
"Give me a ‘A’"
Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhh
yes/ Ulysses he done come home
yes/ i must be the New World
yes/ Ulysses he done come home
yes/ i must be the New World
yes/ i'm in tune
just/ yes/ oh yes/ just play me
baby/ play me/
yes/

Scene 7

mesl (male english as a second language): in defense of bilingualism

SPEAKER
i watch black & white movies the way
yall hanker after the World Series
not like i'm on first base or nothin
& i surely won't be pitchin
but i do know how to walk em or
bring in three wit one hit to the far
outfield

yeah. i hadda brother & he showed me some things.

but
i learnt what i know bout game-playin
on saturdays fore dawn on reruns
of who for you are Jim Brown & Willie Mays/
when i fly i don't condense to a pigskin
ellipse or a leather suited billiard ball
popped outta Yankee Stadium
who for you is ecstasy on Wrigley Field
is Tyrone Power as Zorro
Ronald Coleman seekin out the
Guillotine for my honor
not my chastity or my reputation/
Ronald Coleman's deliberately
riskin himself cuz/ he loved me so
just on accounta he had offered himself
to me/
he'd die
fore that gift was took from me.
there are no umpires/ in my game
& no men in lil striped shirts/ usin
sign language
deaf women don't understand/

hey/

we go for broke/ where i suit up/ but
i caint say 'xactly where that is
less/ i buy me 19 acres & some astroturf/
yall got no clarity/ bout what game
it is we playin.
so/
i'ma talk to you the best i can/
awright/
here's the whole/ 9/ yards/
i'm the black queen/ but
that don't make this chess/ cuz
kings don't hold no sway here/ like pawns
they come & go/
this aint football/ cuz men
whose faces i caint see/ don't get
close enough to me/ to tackle nothin/
& i'm not the quarterback/ cuz
low-riders don't waste alla they
hydraulic wizardry/ on nothin
that aint a whole lotta somethin/
i cd be a goalie/ but why i'm
gone stand round myself wit a crooked stick?
& i have no desire/ to bounce balls
offa my head/ in fronta

thousands of people
when i swim
i'm not aimin for the other side/
i'm warm waters/ inchin thru coral
lookin to galavant/ on a dolphin's back.

what's the rush abt?

you caint make a dolphin into a gazelle
in less than 30,000 years/
if i take my time
i might come upon Shangri-la/ Mt˙ Fuji
long fore yall gotta
national holiday for
Satchel Paige
or convince the five
percenters
they aint the only ones goin
to Heaven/
while they mock Malcom & call
alla
the rest of us/ they "earths"

whatchu think you standin on?

Diamonds?
Diamonds/ deep in South Africa/ or Chicago?
you think you are really
on the Stairway
to Heaven?
that/ you the decidin factor/ in
overtime/ hey
did you ever go to the movies/
& know
you/ the hero?

(i caint be no Scarlet/ if you caint find Charleston/ & the Blue Dahlia/ aint nothin but another bar/ less you give me them flowers/ & Sally caint meet Harry/ or Tom or Dick/ til you ready/ for a feature film)

this/ is really the bottom line.

i love/ black & white movies/
that's/ the world i was born to/ alla
them pastel circles round/ neptune/
rose quartz moon's flirtin wit saturn/
rouge hues over mars/
are outer space to me/

& i do/ wanna play wit you/

i don't wanta win/ necessarily/
that'd be nice/ but it's how you

say/ "engagée"/ that stirs me & scares you/
in my ballpark/ nobody's decimated/ nobody's
a loser/ but
it can get rough/

(we cd leave the Astrodome/ in alla our regalia/ & nobody'd know/ no/ where no/ way

who'd won or lost what)

but/
they'd know somethin happened/
there was some back breakin/ knee twistin/
shoulder dislocatin/ leapin gainst the
leftfield fence/ shin-splintin/ bitin dust/
umpire cursin/ slidin into home
fandangle/
oh/
they'd know/
that's/ how i play
that's how i play/ everything/
but/ you say/
"everything seems to work out
when we talk it over in bed"

hum/

if you cd slam-dunk it/ maybe i'd
rush the goalposts carryin blue satin/
string the basket wit red silk/
oil yr body wit mine/
HEY/ HEY/ WHAT D'YA SAY/
wit some discipline/ 9-3-36-41/
GOOD GOD?
you might even match my stayin power!
OOOOOOOH. . .let's see/ that/ again/ slowly/
frame by frame/ imagine that backhand/ pass/
why isaiah thomas/ cdn't have asked for a more/
perfect/ YES
this is America's genius. . .
can you/
did you ever see that move?
have/
you ever seen that/ kind of co-or-di-. . .
did you catch that?
cd you see?
OOOOOOOOHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!
whatta game/

hey/ do you wanna play wit me?

Scene 8

devotion to one lover or another

SPEAKER
i bathe in gardenia scented
water/ amaryllis fricia & white tulips
move-to-&-from me the way brazen niggahs
what cd dance do when it suit them/ flower
petals lavender coral ivory *rojo amarillo pretu*/
yes/ black petals/ float & open like i do when
i am a devoted lover/ my baths are rituals
like cock crows & cornbread/ but aint a
lover i been devoted to ever known/ thought
abt/ bothered/ or imagined what kinda flowers
should creep over my breasts/ the bubbles & steam
cleanse me of all extraneous energies/ dirt
the earth forces her ravenous scent outta
me/ less i halfway fricassee my definitively
sensate geechee body/ hot hot waters gotta
seduce my muscles/ stretch me/ exorcize
them toxins/ the flower petals
carry danger way from me
this method of survival
has yet to be detected/
it's a pity no one has ever thought
to put you in a tub of flowers
where yr loveliness/ niggah/
is unencumbered/
just steamin
now/ how to stay clean/
we all know white folks
carry lice/ but the world is fulla vermin
what'll kill a something fragile as a love/ & yes
we had good times/ they was beauty there/
so startlin/ as to obscure the veritable north star
but i am not awash in lovers/ quite like that/
it's the ones i cursed/ threw bottles at/ &
plain made myself a ravin fool over/ they
understand my survival/ that i'm still here/
that/ whatever inarticulate desires
we rocked & rolled jus haveta stop demandin
so much/ but that yen to touch/ that
upper lip ever so/ feel yr head up under
them arms/ that/
don't go away/ it stops askin are you awready?
even if i/ kicked him down the stairs/
threw all the damn horns out the window/
that there yen for that touch/ don't care/
& it's time to take a bath/
bedrock don't grow orchids/
i wanna be washed in white tulips/
scarlet amaryllis/ & gardenias/

muthahfuckahs jus caint/ get this together/
i even know some body who wdn't run my water/
& it don't matter to me none/ if
you do think i'm out my rightful mind/
i say/ lovin is more than pleasurin/
which cd run off with any sense you got/
cause/ devotion is sustenance/
& i know what cleans me/ feeds me/
flowers
earth's offered up/ so beautifully
they can float off from me/ with
all this dirt/
we colored & in love/
we in mortal danger/
i don't bathe in wild flowers/ for nothin/

Scene 9

"if i go all the way without you where would i go?" — *The Iseley Brothers*

SPEAKER
there/ to the right of venus
close to where yr lion
stalks our horizon/ see/
listen/
glow scarlet/ char-scarlet/ set my heart down
there/ near you/ scaldin *amarillo*/
oh/ say/ my new day
my dawn/
yr fingers trace the rush of my lips/
ever so reverent/
ever so hungry/
here/
to the right side of venus/
my tongue/
tropical lightenin/
rush/ now/ softly/ tween my toes/ the seas ebb
& in these sands/ i've come back/
an unpredictible swell
a fresh water lily/ in the north atlantic/
when you touch me/ yes
that's how pearls somehow/ rip from the white of my
bones
to yr fingertips/
incontrovertible hard chicago/
rococo implications/
& this/ the mississippi delta/ tween my thighs
yr second touch/ forbids
a thing less/ than primordial fluidity/
no/
i lay next to you/
the undertow at carmel/

the russian river/ feelin up stalks of the best/ of
humboldt county
& damn it/
what makes you think/ my spine is
yr personal/
san andreas fault?
shiftin/ serene fields break for rain/
til
i open/ deep brown moist & black
cobalt sparklin everywhere/
we are
there/
where the pacific fondles my furthest
shores/ detroit-high-russet/ near redwoods/
i am climbin
you chase me/ from limb to limb/
pullin/ the colored stars/ out the
night
slippin em/ over my tongue/
&
i thought i cd get over/
the dangers/ of livin
on the pacific rim/
when i look at you/
i
know/ i am riskin my life/
tossin reason/ to the outback of the far
rockaways/
goin/ givin up/ everything/ with out
protest/
givin up/ meteorological episodes
the appalachian mountains/
handin over/ islands from puget
sound/
travis county hill country/
givin away/ treasures/
i
never
claimed/
til i felt you/
my own december sunset/ teasin cypress/
even campbell street bikers/ in downtown oakland/
i stopped resistin/
what won't/ be orderly/ imagined/ legitimate/
yes/ yes/
hold me
like/ the night grabs wyoming/
& i am more/ than i am not/
i cd sing sacred lyrics/ to songs i don't know/
my cheek/ rubs gainst the nappy black/ cacti of yr
chest/

& i am a flood/ of supernovas/
if you kiss me like that/ i'm browned wetlands
yr lips/ invite the moon/ to meander/
our mouths open & sing/
yes/
our tongues/
the edge of the earth/

END OF PLAY.